

(Dis)identification, Hybridized Forms, and Efficacious Enactment in Adichie's "We Should All Be Feminists"

Abstract: This paper examines the feminist rhetoric of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie in the speech "We Should All Be Feminists" from the 2012 TEDxEuston conference. The author argues that Adichie's rhetoric reinvents classical notions of form, identification, and enactment to address prominent audience-related obstacles. Since 2012, the speech has been sampled by Beyoncé, turned into a best-selling book by the same name, and the title was used in a Dior collection. The wide-reaching effect of Adichie's message calls for a closer examination of what strategies feminist rhetoric might adopt to better overcome common audience-related obstacles.

It is hard to imagine that a song with the repeated phrase "bow down bitches" would be widely considered feminist. And yet, Beyoncé's 2013 track "****Flawless" samples a 2012 speech made by Nigerian author and intellectual Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie entitled, "We Should All Be Feminists." Adichie has spoken many times in response to criticism of allowing her work to be used by a hyper-sexualized, image-focused celebrity in a song with seemingly misogynistic lyrics; she highlights the importance of popular culture in the spread of ideology: her speech now has over 2.5 million views on YouTube, and Beyoncé's video for "****Flawless" has over 19 million. On this issue, Adichie ultimately and controversially decides, "Whoever says they're feminist is bloody feminist" (Danielle).

To better understand the mass appeal of her speech, this project analyzes Adichie's unique use of rhetoric as a rebranding and re-presenting of feminist ideology for Nigerian, African, and international audiences. Throughout this analysis, I advance three claims. First, her careful use of (dis)identification aligns her argument with both Nigerian (African) and feminist identities, rectifying her conflicting positions and overcoming significant audience-related obstacles. Second, Adichie's hybridization of epideictic and deliberative forms enables her to discuss present values as future-oriented action. Third, her construction of "efficacious" enactment both demonstrates for the audience the action she envisions

(reflective deliberation) while simultaneously engaging the audience in that action. These innovative approaches not only help to explain the speech's success, but also have the potential to provide new insights to rhetorical criticism. Before providing a more detailed consideration of these arguments, I turn to an explication of the rhetorical situation Adichie faced at the 2012 TEDxEuston conference where the speech was originally made, drawing on Nigeria's recent history of gender-based legislative action as it relates to African feminist theories and persistent cultural resistance.

The Rhetorical Situation: Gender in Nigeria and African Feminist Traditions

Adichie was born two years after the UN declared the Women's Decade (1975-1985) and two years before Northern Nigerian women would gain the right to vote. She grew up in an upper class Igbo family; both of her parents worked at the University of Nigeria in Nsukka. Her father was the first Professor of Statistics, her mother the first female Registrar. Coincidentally, Adichie grew up in acclaimed African novelist Chinua Achebe's former home. It was his influence, Adichie says, "that made me realize my own story could be in a book...I didn't think it was possible for people like me to be in books" (McGrath). She recalls enjoying reading and storytelling as a child, and began writing at a young age (Adichie "A Nigerian"). When it came time for university Adichie went to medical school at the University of Nigeria because, as a good student, that's what she was "supposed to do" (Adichie "We Should"). But while in her medical program, unable to ignore her passion for writing, she worked on student publications and literary magazines. By the time she turned 19 in 1996, she decided to move to the US for education so that she might better pursue her passion for writing. It was in these years at Eastern Connecticut State University (1997-2001), John's Hopkins University (2001-2003), and Yale

(2006-2008) that she worked on her novels *The Purple Hibiscus* (2003), *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2007), and the short story collection *The Thing Around Your Neck* (2009). She began gaining recognition and acclaim for her work with her first novel, and received grants and fellowships to continue working on additional novels including the Hodder Fellowship at Princeton (2005-2006), the MacArthur Foundation “Genius” Grant (2008), and a fellowship at the Radcliffe Institute at Harvard (2011-2012), the support from which enabled her to write her third novel, *Americanah* (2013).

Adichie is known for being a strongly “African” writer and yet also a feminist. Adichie’s novels focus on Nigerian history and culture, particularly the Biafran War, a civil war between the Igbo people and the federal government from 1967-1970. Her novels also examine culturally ingrained practices, like patriarchal violence and the subordination of women. With her sociohistorical focus she is often classified as an African or Nigerian novelist, but she is also often identified as a feminist writer (see Andrade; Hewett; Norridge). The themes in her novels, while not overtly feminist, do construct representations of women not often seen in the otherwise male-dominated literary scene in Nigeria (Hewett 77). Feminism remains a controversial issue for many in Nigeria, particularly in the ways it questions long-held and deep-rooted cultural practices and beliefs (Durojaye et al.; Pereria; Ntoimo et al.; Makama; Omoyibo). Being a feminist in Africa often comes, as it has for Adichie, with the criticism of abandoning traditions and culture, specifically being seen as “too Western” (Pereria 264). Mekegwe notes that African feminists, “sought to demonstrate that they were relevant to the African context and in particular, that they did not simply seek to emulate their western feminist counterparts” (13). For these reasons, it is interesting that Adichie is highly regarded in her writing and thinking on matters

Nigerian and feminist alike. It is also significant, then, that her publication timeline mirrors many important legislative changes for gender equality in Nigeria.

In the early 2000s, Nigerian government passed policy resolutions and legislature focused on supporting gender equality in the home, at school, in business, and in government. Nigeria gained independence from Britain in 1960, but didn't become democratic until 1999. From the 1960s on, it was controlled by the military and saw its worst political regimes between 1986 and 1998 (Oyelere 345). May of 1999 marked the beginning of democracy, when Olusegun Odasanjo became the president. Nigeria is currently in its longest stretch of democracy, a period which "has led to a lot of political, economic, and institutional reforms" (ibid.). Many of these programs sought specifically to empower women and reduce gender disparity. Of great significance is the 1999 Constitution of Nigeria, which for the first time expressly prohibits discrimination on the grounds of sex ("Nigeria"). For example, Section 17 provides that the state shall ensure that "all citizens, without discrimination on any group whatsoever, have the opportunity for securing adequate means of livelihood as well as adequate opportunity to secure suitable employment" (Durojaye 6174). The change to the constitution after democratization was the first of many reforms and legislative acts to attempt to bring about gender equality in Nigeria.

In addition to changes in constitutional language, "Nigeria has demonstrated a commitment to many international conventions by signing and ratifying several major global treaties including the International Civil and Political Rights Covenant, The International Economic, Social and Cultural Rights Covenant, the Convention of the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), and the Children's Rights Convention," (Omoluabi 375). It is important to note that some Western countries, most notably the United

States, have yet to ratify CEDAW. Omoluabi further details the steps taken by Nigerian government since the Women's Decade (1975-1985) that have bridged gender gaps in order to support nation building, including but not limited to the creation of: Ministry of Affairs and Social Development in the thirty-six states of the federation, a Women's Department in the Federal Capital Territory, the Women in Agriculture Program (WIA), micro credit institutions for women, regular reports for CEDAW at the UN, The Women Fund for Economic Empowerment (WOFEE), the Women Trust Funds, the National Policy on Women which covers female genital mutilation, gender policy for the Nigerian Police Force, and gender based-violence prohibition law (376). Additionally, Nigerian government instituted a National Gender Policy in 2006 with the aim to make significant changes in governance for the lives of women in order to achieve better economic growth (Ntoimo et al. 1981). Clearly, much legislative attention has been given to the need for effective policy in ending gender discrimination and supporting gender equality.

Despite these legislative actions and organizational affiliations, women in Nigeria remain marginalized. Currently, Nigeria ranks 118 of 134 on the Gender Equality Index ("Gender in Nigeria"). Issues that women continue to face in Nigeria include; domestic abuse, sexual violence, unequal employment and unequal pay, unequal ownership and inheritance rights (patrilineal familial and legal systems), unequal access to banks or lines of credit, unequal access to education, unequal pressure to marry and limited rights in marriage, and unequal representation in decision making at home, at work, and in government (Kazeem; Makama; Durojaye). Many have theorized that the more important issues to address are culture and tradition, believing that legislature itself doesn't have the ability to change the attitudes or actions of the people (Omoyibo et al.; Omuluabi; Makama; Mekegwe; Durojaye; Pereria;

Ntoimo et al.; Isuigo-Abanihe.). Omuluabi notes, “Many of Nigeria’s gender sensitive policies remain on paper, rather than in practice. Both cultural and religious factors are often used to block gender equality in the country” (Omoluabi et al 376). Others have found that Nigeria’s pluralism makes it difficult to enforce laws and regulations, especially those that are connected to issues of culture and tradition. “Like many other African countries that have undergone colonialism, Nigeria is a pluralist state. Legal pluralism is often used to describe a situation where a subject matter or issue is regulated by multiple laws, norms or forums that coexist within the same jurisdiction” (Durojaye 6170). So, for example, the geographical differences between the north (predominately Muslim) and the south (predominantly Christian) add “an important dimension to gender inequality” (“Gender in Nigeria” 7). This North/South divide was greatly exaggerated by the adoption of democracy and liberal politics, which advanced religious freedoms. Twelve states in Northern Nigeria have adopted Sharia Law, which is known for its traditional attitudes toward gender roles. “Adherence to Islamic and customary law reinforces practices that are unfavourable to women, including those relating to freedom of movement, marriage, and inheritance. Although an ‘Abolition of all Forms of Discrimination against Women in Nigeria and other Related Matters Bill’ was considered in the mid- 2000s, the National Assembly did not pass this bill nor a related national bill prohibiting violence against women” (“Nigeria” 13). Additionally, Omuluabi et al. observe that, “Lack of gender balance in decision-making positions in government is the norm in Nigeria with sharp regional differentials. Data from the Northern zones report a very low participation of women in politics and public life. While women in Southern Nigeria gained the right to vote in 1959, it was not until 1979 – twenty years after – that Northern Nigerian women were allowed to vote” (Omoluabi et al 375).

It is precisely these cultural and legal inconsistencies that make it difficult to form a united effort in ending discrimination against women in Nigeria. It appears that although much legislative action has sought to promote gender equality and to make gender discriminatory practices illegal, the persistence of culturally entrenched beliefs undermine efforts to establish equality. This context sets the rhetorical obstacles and goals for Adichie's speech; she must be gracious in her treatment of traditional culture because it is influential for her audience, but she must find space to question the outcomes of that culture while highlighting an individual's ability to change culture and tradition in their own lives. To do this, I argue, Adichie uses rhetorical (dis)identification, hybridizes traditional topoi, and innovates a new form of enactment. The following sections of this paper explore each of these moves through theoretical and textual evidence.

(Dis)identification: Nigeria and Western Feminism

As the previous section describes, Adichie faces significant audience and topic related obstacles given the purpose of her speech. She is Nigerian, but of an upper class Igbo family—one in which both parents worked as trailblazers in their fields. Her position in Nigerian society enabled her to complete her extensive education in the United States, possibly causing some to question how “Western” she has become, whether she has forgotten her Nigerian roots. These audience obstacles bleed into topic related ones, with feminism seen as a largely “Western” endeavor, even in direct conflict with Nigerian tradition and culture. As such, Adichie must not only reinforce her identification as Nigerian, but must also carefully (dis)identify herself with Western feminism.

Kenneth Burke sought to move the focus of rhetoric from persuasion to identification (Burke in Bizzell and Herzberg 1325). The key concept for Burke's theory is consubstantiality. Through consubstantiality, a person becomes "substantially one" with someone other than themselves, but retains their status as "an individual locus of motives" (1325). In this way, the person is both "joined and separate, at one a distinct substance and consubstantial with another" (1325). As Krista Ratcliffe explains, Burke's notion of identification considers "the ways in which individuals are at odds with one another, or become identified with groups more or less at odds with one another" (48). So identification is not just a consideration of the commonalities between speaker and audience or speaker and subject, but significant differences as well.

Adichie incurs the obstacle of difference in her attempts at identification; her Nigerian identity is "at odds" with her feminist one, which may also be interpreted as "Western." In this way, Adichie's consubstantiality could be best visualized by a Venn diagram, with Western feminist on one side and Nigerian on the other. She speaks from the middle to audiences that exist in only one side of the diagram or, for international audiences, perhaps neither at all. As Ratcliffe makes clear, "because people are always historically and culturally situated, so, too, are their embodied identifications" (49). In this way identification is seen as a "metaphoric space" where one person is synthesized with another in order to "bridge differences and create common ground" (ibid 52). In this way, it is Adichie's goal, through her use of identification, to welcome her listeners into the middle, to the place where one can be both Nigerian (African) and feminist. For non-Nigerian/ non-African listeners, this space can be equally understood as existing between their cultural traditions and feminist ideology. Adichie keeps the topics of the speech universal enough to meet this aim.

Diana Fuss adds to Burke's theory ideas regarding the role of disidentification. For her, disidentification "signifies an identification that is not so much refused but "disavowed" (Ratcliffe 62). Identifications, in Fuss's conceptualization, are the replacement of material objects with mental images. As such any "disidentifications are dependent upon previous identification however faulty or stereotypical" (Ratcliffe 62). In this way, Adichie's disidentification with Western feminism is not based on what Western feminism actually is (its material reality) but with her audience's identification with that concept, even if it is oversimplified, faulty, or stereotypical. To overcome this issue, Adichie must ground the concepts of feminism in "material reality via a kind of cultural/historical archeological/ethnographic work that the subject doing the conscious identifying must be willing to perform" (ibid 63). In the words of feminist rhetorical scholar Jacqueline Jones Royster, Adichie's audience needs to learn about her " 'home place' because such learning helps construct places of identification" (Royster qtd. in Ratcliffe 62-63). Adichie's "home place" here is found in the ways she has been able to construct feminist ideology to coexist with her Nigerian identity; her speech welcomes the listener to cohabitate. To achieve these effects of identification, Adichie identifies with her Nigerian nationality while disidentifying with her audience's negative conceptualization of Western feminism.

First, Adichie makes quick moves in the beginning of the speech to assure the audience that she is Nigerian. While anyone familiar with her biography knows that she was born and raised in Nigeria, audience members skeptical of the West may question the ways in which her years and education abroad have changed her. She reminds the audience that her "brother Chuks and [her] best friend Ike are part of the organizing team" for the conference and that Kamzia Adichie, her niece, is in the audience. Her first story is about her childhood friend Okuloma who,

she reminds the audience, “died in the notorious Sosoliso Plane Crash in Nigeria of 2005.” Invoking this national tragedy and her intimate relation to it creates strong identification with other Nigerians in the audience, and with Africans more generally. The anecdotal evidence she uses in her speech connect to specifically Nigerian experiences, for example when she describes the “wonderful Lagos fixture, the sprinkling of energetic men who hang around outside establishments and very dramatically “help” you park your car” or when she relates a story of wanting to become the class monitor in elementary school, a common position in Nigerian classrooms. To justify why her speech, likely to be heard by listeners from around the world, focuses mostly on Nigeria, she explains that Nigeria is “where I know, and where my heart is.” This identification with Nigerian citizenship and patriotism is an important foundation in her move to disidentify with Western feminism.

It is clear through her early rhetorical choices that Adichie is aware of the hesitation for the audience to accept the premise of her speech. She explains that the word “feminist is so heavy with baggage, negative baggage. You hate men, you hate bras, you hate African culture, that sort of thing.” This is a direct naming of the identifications of feminism many audience members may bring to the speech, however faulty or stereotypical. She humorously explains the ways in which women can be criticized for being feminist in Nigeria: they are militant, unhappy, or too Western. Her friend, Okuloma treats her emerging feminism as a fourteen-year old as if she were a “supporter of terrorism.” Later, a Nigerian journalist tells her not call herself a feminist “because feminists are women who are unhappy because they cannot find husbands.” Finally, Adichie recounts an experience with a Nigerian professor who tells her that her feminism is a product of corruption from “Western books.” Adichie disidentifies with these labels, finally calling herself a “happy African feminist who does not hate men and who likes lip

gloss and who wears high heels for herself but not for men.” Each of these qualifications represents an interpretation of feminists: unhappy, “Western,” man-hating, ugly. She also notes that the “Western” books she read were “decidedly unfeminist” (mostly romance novels) and that the “feminist classics” bored her and that she “really struggled to finish them.” By placing these stories, and the identifications they represent, at the beginning of the speech Adichie sets a tone of both humor and awareness. She doesn’t expect her audience to easily give up these identifications, but by naming them Adichie gains some power to alter the identifications.

In her (dis)identification with Western feminism, Adichie leaves behind these common perceptions and puts forth a form of feminism that sounds different from what is found in the West. Western feminist rhetoric is commonly perceived as forensic because it seeks to assign blame (men, the patriarchy) for past action (marginalization, discrimination). Forensic rhetoric “either attacks or defends somebody” and is concerned with the past so as to seek a more just future (Aristotle 1358b). Much of Western feminism holds that by understanding the ways that hegemonic patriarchy has worked (attacking forces in the past) feminism can begin to build a better future for women (justice). In this conceptualization, men are the perpetrators and women are the victims. For these reasons, men, both as reluctant perpetrators and the beneficiaries of patriarchal traditions, often approach feminism with caution and even defensiveness. A lack of male participation or support in the feminist movement has been a significant obstacle for all waves of Western feminism.

By rejecting Western feminism’s inclination for forensic rhetoric, Adichie is able to maintain identification with her audience and prevent audience alienation or defensiveness. She frames the concerns of feminism as concerns of the current social construction of gender more broadly. She admits the biological differences between men and women (“we have different

hormones, we have different sexual organs, we have different biological abilities...”) but separates these from issues of gender (“Gender as it functions today is a grave injustice...” “The problem with gender is that it prescribes how we should be rather than recognizing who we are.”). She explains the injustices of socialized gender through hypothetical examples. To this end, Adichie makes a bold organizational decision; she begins with the ways in which gender harms men and then links to this the effects it has on women. She shows that the social construction of masculinity is a “small, hard cage” that “stifles the humanity of boys” and that “we teach them to mask their true selves, because they have to be, in Nigerian speak, ‘Hard man!’” She shows that it is through this socialization of hyper-masculinity that many of the issues for women arise; women must structure their lives so as to not “emasculate” men, a claim that no longer sounds like an issue of over-inflated egos but of deeply-entrenched ideology that takes from men their essential humanity. That half of a speech entitled “We Should All Be Feminists” is concerned with the harmful effects of hyper-masculinity likely comes as a surprise to most audience members who are more prepared for the forensic, blame-placing, woman-focused rhetoric of Western feminism.

A particular example of her expert use of identification is the space she creates for male listeners. A character throughout the speech is her “brilliant, progressive” friend Louis. He believes that feminist concerns are an issue of the past, that essentially now women have it fine. Men in the audience are invited to identify with this stance and rather than being treated as a woman-hating perpetrator, they can be seen as “brilliant” and “progressive” like Louis. Essentially, Louis is blinded by, but not complicit in, his privilege. In this way, through the character of Louis, who Adichie clearly holds in high regard, Adichie provides the men in the audience a safe space to experience the development of the speech without feeling guilt or blame

for their privilege. Adichie explains that she “often makes the mistake of thinking that something that is obvious to me is just as obvious to everyone else” and because of this she couldn’t understand how her friend Louis “could not see what seemed so self-evident.” She agrees with the implied position: “gender is not an easy conversation to have. For both men and women, to bring up gender sometimes encounters almost immediate resistance.” And she even names, in a deeply cynical and sarcastic tone, a common thought men in the audience might be having, “Women, true to selves?” In all of these ways, Adichie identifies strongly with the position of most men in the audience: it isn’t that they don’t care or are actively seeking to subordinate women, it’s that men and women experience the realities of the world in different ways. Essentially, then, the speech becomes an attempt to explain “what seemed so self-evident.” The careful and gracious treatment of male audience members helps with identification, carving out a space where men can engage with the speech without invoking guilt or blame, which are often products of Western feminist forensic rhetoric.

Adichie uses (dis)identification to bridge the gap between her conflicting identities: a Nigerian feminist. Her identification with her Nigerian roots throughout the speech is a calculated move given the immediate arena—a conference focused on issues in Africa. In a post-colonial world, an African woman with a Western education must carefully chart the intersectionalities of these identities, carrying the heavy weight of colonial memory. It is interesting, as well, to consider the ways in which relocation of feminism from its forensic traditions may have influenced the wide reception of the speech, and its subsequent publication, more palatable to a Western audience seeking a new conceptualization of feminism that does not engage with perpetrator/victim mentality. It is worth considering a more holistic use of this

strategy if this kind of rhetorical reframing can engage men and non-identifying women in feminist conversation in less defensive ways.

Merging Deliberative and Epideictic Forms

In addition to uses of (dis)identification to overcome audience and topic related rhetorical obstacles, Adichie merges two forms of Aristotle's rhetorical tripartite. The tripartite is composed of forensic, deliberative, and epideictic forms. As was discussed in the previous section, Adichie distances her speech from the forensic forms most commonly found in Western feminist rhetoric to rework audiences' (dis)identification with feminist ideology. Additionally, she merges deliberative and epideictic topoi to present value *as* action.

Epideictic speeches focus on *values* and are generally limited to the present situation. Deliberative speech focus on *choices* and therefore expand their scope into future actions and consequences. Deliberative speeches also tend to focus on changes in law and policy, and therefore occur in primarily legislative arenas (Keith and Lundberg 25). Adichie's speech is concerned with the *value* of adopting feminist ideology, and it is concerned with personal *choices* because it speaks to a context in which legislative action has been unable to outweigh the influences of tradition and culture. By instilling both the *value* of adopting feminist ideology and the personal agency (*choice*) to make change, Adichie merges epideictic and deliberative speech forms. A rhetorical analysis of her speech shows that it is insufficient label it as first epideictic and then deliberative, or vice versa, but requires that it as seen as a fluent merging of the two. Aristotle, in *The Rhetoric* speaks to the potentials of this merging. He explains that "one thing may entail another in either of two ways—(1) simultaneously, (2) subsequently. Thus, learning entails knowledge subsequently, health entails life simultaneously (1362a30). In this

way, Adichie can present value *as* action. As Aristotle explains, “deliberation seeks to determine not ends but the means to ends, i.e. what it is more useful to do” (1362a25). Adichie’s deliberation is also epideictic, or value based; adopting feminist ideology is the useful thing to do, and by doing so a person brings change. In this way, the speech constructs not value or action, or even value and action, but value *as* action.

Adichie makes this merging clear about three-quarters of the way through the speech. She states, “Now today, there are many more opportunities for women than there were during my grandmother’s time because of changes in policy, changes in law, all of which are very important. But what matters even more is our attitude, our mindset, what we believe and what we value about gender.” She acknowledges the importance of legislative change and action, but privileges the change in values. These changes directly address the obstacles of the rhetorical situation, in which the widespread change in legislative action has limited effect due to deeply entrenched traditions and cultural beliefs. After describing the harmful effects of hyper-masculinity on both men and women, she encourages, “The problem with gender is that it prescribes how we should be rather than recognizing how we are. Now imagine how much happier we would be, how much freer to be our true individual selves, if we didn’t have the weight of gender expectations.” She hopes that to achieve this, the audience will “dream about and plan for a different world, a fairer world; a world of happier men and happier women who are truer to themselves.” This line in particular demonstrates the merging of deliberative and epideictic forms, of Adichie’s presentation of value *as* action.

Adichie does propose a particular action in the speech, but I argue that this action is not the focus of the speech as a whole, but rather a logical foray into the following section. She suggests that the way to change the “weight of gender expectations” is to “raise our daughters differently”

and to “raise our sons differently.” The section of the speech that follows explores the ways in which gender functions in children’s lives, connecting those to the adult outcomes of these gender expectations. These examples merge the deliberative and epideictic, looking at the value of gender and the action of approaching it differently from birth on. However, the purpose of the speech is not simply to persuade parents to raise their children differently. The speech as a whole considers the ways in which gender functions in anachronistic ways, resulting in outcomes that are no longer culturally relevant. For example, Adichie explains the ways that biology and gender expectations used to better match the environmental contexts: “So in a literal way, men rule the world, and this made sense a thousand years ago because human beings lived then in a world in which physical strength was the most important attribute for survival. The physically stronger person was more likely to lead, and men, in general, are physically stronger.” This is where many such evolutionary explanations end, as a justification for gender-based difference in the world. But she continues, “But today we live in a different world. The person more likely to lead is not the physically stronger person, it is the more creative person, the more intelligent person, the more innovative person, and there are no hormones for those attributes.” This, in essence, is the purpose of Adichie’s speech—to demonstrate the ways in which gender as it stands today no longer matches the societal context. So, while there are actions proposed in the speech, such as raising children differently or sharing domestic work, these are not the purpose of the speech as a whole. The purpose is to investigate the ways in which cultural interpretations of gender prevent us all from attaining our most true selves, our fullest humanity—and to suggest that changing these valuations is powerful in itself.

As a key rhetorical obstacle, as well as an obstacle to change in the “real” world, Adichie takes on the issue of culture, an epideictic consideration. She defines culture with the weight it

deserves: “culture is really about the preservation and continuity of a people.” But she uses chiasmus when she explains, “culture does not make people, people make culture.” This idea that culture can be changed, and that we are the agents of this change is a formulation of value *as* action, and connects to Adichie’s final definition of feminist: “A feminist is a man or a woman who says, ‘Yes, there’s a problem with gender as it is today, and we must fix it. We must do better.’” A deliberative speech would have begun rather than ended here, and an epideictic speech would have been concerned with only the first part of the definition. Adichie’s speech is concerned with both at once and is more adept in influencing both audience value and audience action since she poses them as one in the same.

Efficacious Enactment

In addition to her strategic use of (dis)identification and the speech’s hybridized form, Adichie relies heavily on enactment. Through enactment, a rhetoric strategy of proof, the rhetor stands as “living proof of the claim s/he is making” (Campbell and Huxman). I argue that Adichie uses a specialized form of enactment, which I term “efficacious” enactment. My use of the term efficacious comes from Catholic theology and describes the ways in which sacraments function as both signs and signifiers: “the visible sign actually effects in us the invisible reality that it signifies” (Pizzalato par. 6). For example, the sign of water in baptism represents cleansing while the baptism cleanses both literally (of dirt) and symbolically (of sin). Another example unrelated to theology is that of a “Stop” sign versus McDonald’s “Golden Arches.” The first is an efficacious sign; the “Stop” symbol brings about a physical act of stopping. McDonald’s “Golden Arches” are a symbol of food, but will not always bring about the act of

eating. That which both signifies and results in the signified action can be considered efficacious.

As such, Adichie's rhetoric can be considered "efficacious" enactment because the speech itself causes the audience to perform the reflective deliberation she enacts. This variation is distinct from other forms because enactment itself does not always bring about the change or mindset it addresses. For example, Mary Fisher's speech "A Whisper of AIDS" is well known for its use of enactment; through her speech she aims to bring people out of silence, and she herself comes out of silence to give the speech. And yet, there is nothing in the speech *itself* that immediately causes others to come out of silence. A careful consideration of Adichie's rhetoric reveals that she asks the audience to use reflective deliberation in daily life, and also has them practice this by the very act of listening to the speech, which is an enactment of this form of deliberation. This is potentially a new rhetorical strategy, and understanding its usage and effect in Adichie's speech could impact future rhetorical choices and criticism, particularly those where significant audience related obstacles exist. Adichie constructs this efficacious enactment primarily through a combination of rhetorical questions, anecdotes, and refutation.

A striking feature of Adichie's speech is the nearly singular use of anecdote as evidence. The speech contains only one statistic: that 52% of the world's population is female. There is one appeal to authority, when Adichie quotes the Kenyan Nobel Peace Laureate Wangari Maathai who said, "The higher you go, the fewer women there are." In her thirty-minutes on stage, Adichie shares twenty-seven anecdotes both real and hypothetical. These anecdotes often follow from one of the ten major rhetorical questions in the speech, as a way to work the audience through the answer. For example, she asks "But what if we question the premise of [emasculatation] itself, why should a woman's success be a threat to a man?" Here the audience

experiences this common cultural assumption anew, able to reframe an understanding of it. Had Adichie said more declaratively, “Men should not be threatened by women’s success” or “Women, don’t let a man get in the way of your success” the ability to reflect on the issue, to gain new ground or perspective is lost. To this question Adichie shares a story that provides a potential answer: “A Nigerian acquaintance once asked me if I was worried that men would be intimidated by me. I was not worried at all. In fact, it has not occurred to me to be worried because a man who would be intimidated by me is exactly the kind of man I would have no interest in.” The audience laughs, which is surprising because this statement nearly reflects the man-hating or “I don’t need a man” perception of Western feminism. It is her foray into the topic that makes it approachable. This all points to efficacious enactment because the rhetorical question—*anecdote* move carries the audience with Adichie through her thinking, but leaves space open for them to do their own as well. It asks the questions that Adichie wants them to ask themselves, and by asking and answering she not only enacts this practice of reflective deliberation but also *initiates* it in the listening audience.

Adichie also relies on refutation to build efficacious enactment. Here we see an overlap of Adichie’s strategies with identification and her use of efficacious enactment. She tells the audience that she too is “trying to unlearn many of the lessons of gender that I internalized when I was growing up.” One of the ways she helps the audience unlearn some of these internalized lessons is through this process of refutation. The string of counterargument/refutation runs throughout the speech, but is heavily concentrated at the end. It is almost as if Adichie is saying, “Some people are going to try to stop you from this reflective deliberation, from continuing this conversation. Here’s what they might say. Here’s what you can say back.” For example in explaining that people are almost immediately made uncomfortable by conversations of gender

she predicts, “some people will bring up evolutionary biology and apes, how, you know, female apes bow down to male apes and that sort of thing. But the point is we’re not apes.” She’s made points in other parts of the speech that discuss the ways in which gender distinctions based on evolution no longer serve us, and these can be recalled by the audience here. Later she anticipates that “some people will say that a woman being subordinate to a man is our culture. But culture is constantly changing.” To explore this she shares a story about how she has twin nieces, but these nieces would have been killed, according to cultural practice, had then been born a hundred years earlier. Adichie efficaciously enacts by anticipating for her audience the counterarguments they will likely incur if they begin their own conversations about gender or enact their own reflective deliberation.

Adichie uses efficacious enactment to both stand as proof of what she is claiming and make the audience proof of that claim as well by *initiating* in them this form of reflective deliberation. To do this this speech makes use rhetorical questions, anecdotes, and refutation. These strategies match the context, and other rhetors seeking to use, or scholars search for uses of, efficacious enactment would have to consider what rhetorical decisions would bring about this sign/signified relationship between message and audience. Efficacious enactment seems to have particular promise for rhetorical contexts where there are both topic and audience related obstacles, and that they obstacles have been resistant against previous attempts at reframing and persuasion.

Conclusion: Implications for (Feminist) Rhetorical Criticism

“We Should All Be Feminists” has reached tens of millions of listeners and readers throughout the world. Adichie’s ability to speak globally while focusing on a context familiar to her is significant, and the conclusions reached in this paper have much to add to the current

literature in both general rhetorical criticism and feminist rhetorical criticism. Generally, Adichie's speech innovates on common forms in the tripartite in interesting ways. Her presentation of values *as* action through the merging of deliberative and epideictic topoi presents possibilities for rhetorical acts and criticism in topics where both values and actions are simultaneously under question, for example in debates on abortion, racism, and the environment. Her balanced use of (dis)identification to keep an often marginalized audience engaged is an example for rhetors working in a topic both needs the marginalized's participation while often attacking the marginalized group because of the topic itself. For example, conversations on race in America could benefit from this approach particularly as it relates to white participation and support of anti-racist movements like #BlackLivesMatter. Finally, efficacious enactment provides new language and conceptualizations of enactment that may help to advance rhetoric particularly in areas where audience-related obstacles have been persistent.

Adichie's feminist rhetoric brings to light a larger question for feminists everywhere: In what ways can we begin to move away from the traditionally forensic rhetoric associated with feminist ideology? What can we learn from Adichie's approach to feminism, seeing as it has spanned the globe and created new spaces for reflection and participation? I was intrigued when doing my initial research on the speech to find that men have written rather favorably of it. For example, in his article on *The Telegraph* "Why We Should All Be Feminists" Rupert Hawksley says that reading the book version of the speech, "has forced me to reconsider my opinions in a way that more militant feminist writing never has." As a feminist in the 21st century, I'm interested in advancing whatever forms of feminism can speak to men or non-feminists in this way. With LGBTQ issues emerging as daily debate in today's politics, a feminism that is focused on gender and that attempts to show the way that anachronistic conceptualizations are

harmful to all is a feminism I can get behind. Adichie's rhetoric shows the way that we can build and spread this more inclusive form of feminism.

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